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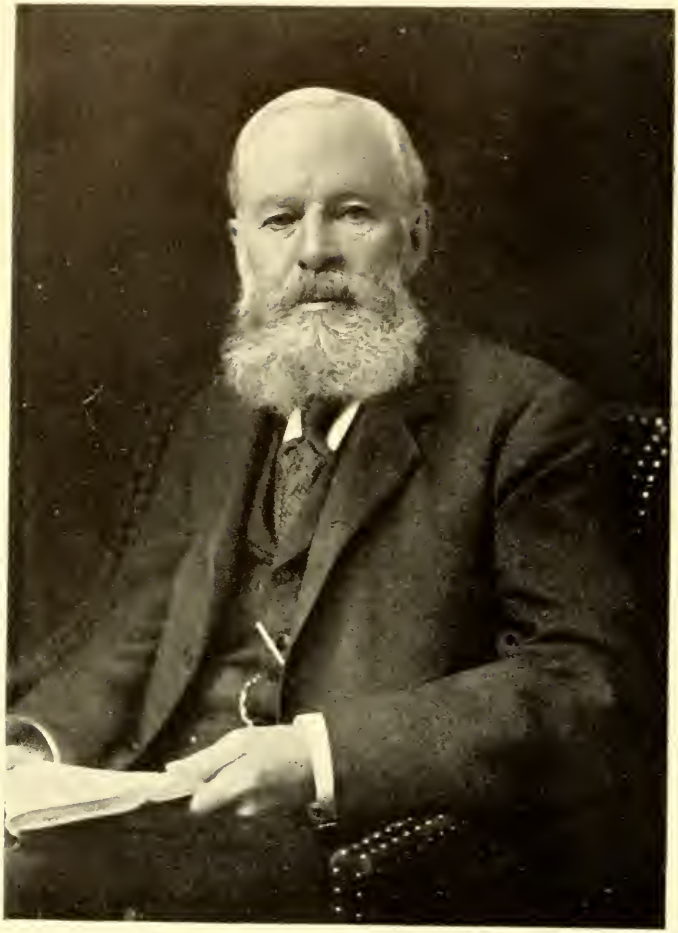

James F. Hunnewell

MEMORIAL

OF

JAMES FROTHINGHAM HUNNEWELL

READ BEFORE

THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY

ON

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BY

HAROLD MURDOCK

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MEMORIAL

MR. JAMES FROTHINGHAM HUNNEWELL, who died at his home in Boston on November 11th, 1910, was one of the original members of this Society and its President at the time of his death. He came of good New England stock, his ancestors on his father's side being identified with the life of Charlestown since 1698. He was born in Charlestown in 1832, the son of James and Susan (Lamson) Hunnewell. Educated in private schools, he early entered the office of his father, who was one of the last of Boston's old-time merchants, and who conducted an extensive business over-seas, sending the American flag on staunch, trim

vessels into the most remote harbors of the world. Indeed as early as 1826 the firm had established a house in the Sandwich Islands. Shortly after the civil war Mr. Hunnewell retired from business, but this move was merely a step to his entrance upon new activities. He became a learned antiquarian and a wise collector, amassing through a succession of busy years a library of rare and curious items, rich in material relating to his native town and State.

As an antiquarian he was a member of the Bostonian, the Massachusetts Historical, and the American Antiquarian Societies. As a collector, he was one of the founders of The Club of Odd Volumes, and served as its President for nearly fifteen years, the office of Honorary President being created for him upon his retirement from active duty. Always a good citizen, he served upon the School Board of Charlestown, rendered invaluable service as a Trustee of the Public

Library there, and later identified himself with the Massachusetts Reform Club. A man of business experience, he was chosen President of the Charlestown Gas Company, and a Trustee of the Five Cents Savings Bank. Of charitable and religious instincts, he became Vice-President of the Winchester Home for Aged Women, Trustee of the Charlestown Dispensary, Vice-President of the Associated Charities, Treasurer of the old First Parish of Charlestown, and an officer of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

In 1858 he received the Honorary degree of A. M. from Beloit College, as a tribute not only to his literary work, but because of kind and efficient service rendered to that institution. Because of the interest stimulated in the lifetime of his father's firm, he appears among the members of the Hawaiian Club in Boston, and while serving as its President he enter-

tained at the old house in Charlestown the last two Queens of the Island Kingdom.

With a keen historical sense and a love of the picturesque, he wielded a graceful pen in the preparation of several literary works, some of which are still popular and in current circulation. His *Records of the First Church, Charlestown*, his *A Century of Town Life*, and the *Bibliography of Charlestown, Mass., and Bunker Hill*, are valuable contributions to the story of his native town. His *Civilization of the Hawaiian Islands*, and his edition of his father's diary under the title of *The Journal of the Voyage of the Missionary Packet, Boston to Honolulu*, were tributes to a people in whose fortunes he always felt a lively interest.

Before his retirement from business Mr. Hunnewell had earned the title of a traveller, and the passion for roaming in foreign lands did not decline with years.

He crossed the Atlantic no less than forty-eight times, and his experience in ocean voyagings, which began in the old sailing packet days, culminated only two years since in the era of turbine engines and triple screws. The fruit of his travels and of the long periods spent abroad may be found in his *England's Chronicle in Stone*, *The Imperial Island*, *The Historical Monuments of France*, and *The Lands of Scott*. These titles form only a part of Mr. Hunnewell's literary work. The proceedings and publications of the various historical and literary societies with which he was connected bear witness to his active interest in the purposes for which they were founded.

It is difficult to characterize a man who was so essentially a member of a generation that has now almost disappeared. Like Squire Hardcastle in Goldsmith's immortal comedy he loved "everything that's old, — old times, old manners, old books." Of only medium stat-

ure and somewhat bent in his later years, he was yet a man of almost distinguished presence. He did not owe his preferment in the historical and bookish societies with which he was identified to any clubbable quality. Perhaps he was never what the man of the street is wont to describe as "a good fellow." Always courteous and urbane, he was also distinguished by a certain self-restraint and reticence that discouraged noisy or undue familiarity. An author of really valuable books, one might have known him for years without learning the fact from his lips. A collector of rare and precious volumes, he was not wont to discuss his treasures. Few, perhaps, even in this Society which he loved, have had the privilege of inspecting that great collection which until his death he fostered in that quiet house beyond the Charles. Is it not fair to assume that this reticence in regard to his achievements and his possessions had its root in modesty and

diffidence? Was there not something here that modern writers and collectors can respect, and perhaps copy to advantage?

Another reason for the reticence we have noted is doubtless to be found in the fact that Mr. Hunnewell possessed a well-stored mind, and was blessed with the imagination of a poet. He enjoyed the companionship of men of kindred tastes, but he had resources in himself that rendered him independent of the strenuous social claims of the present day. He needed no companionship in those fascinating travels and researches that resulted in his *Lands of Scott.* He was in the company of the great Wizard of the North, of Dominie Sampson, Nicol Jarvie and Dandy Dinmont, of Prince Charlie and the plaided chieftains of "The Forty-five," and perhaps of the Queen of Scots herself. It seemed at times as though the name of Scotland

must have been engraven upon the heart of this scholarly, old-fashioned gentleman.

In the Club of Odd Volumes he was wont to give an evening from time to time to one or another of Sir Walter's great masterpieces. His was no technical dissertation upon faults of style or construction, but rather for an hour he ranged among familiar friends and scenes, presenting them to his audience with that quaint charm of which he was a master. He fairly glowed with the love of his theme, and as he quoted paragraph after paragraph of description and dialogue, we seemed to see the bloom of the heather on rain-swept hillsides, and to hear the skirl of the pipes as the clansmen marched along. Moments like these always came as a surprise to those who were only familiar with his bearing upon more formal occasions.

Mr. Hunnewell was endowed with the artistic as well as the poetic temperament, and the despoiler of beauty

in any form was to him anathema. On more than one occasion John Knox and Oliver Cromwell have been the targets for his righteous indignation. An allusion to the ruined abbeys of Scotland never failed to call forth some bitter comment upon the great reformer, while whatever his estimate of Cromwell as a builder of the English state, he never forgave him the ruin wrought by his soldiers within the cathedral of Carlisle.

On the other hand, not many months ago he was much distressed by a brilliant paper read in his presence which laid stress upon certain unchristian qualities in the character of Cotton Mather. He was disturbed and fearful lest these allegations should find their way into print. Now it is not to be supposed that Mr. Hunnewell would have preferred Cotton Mather to John Knox as the leader of the Scottish Reformation, or that he would have trusted Cotton

Mather to have been less rigorous than Cromwell in the employment of the Ironsides against the handiwork of "idolaters." It is more likely that Mr. Hunnewell's partiality for Mather was based upon his respect for an old American family which played a strong part in the making of this nation.

This respect for pedigree, or what is commonly known as "good blood," was a trait strongly marked in him. He was an aristocrat in the broadest and best sense of the word. He believed in the free institutions of his country, but he believed also in the beneficent influence upon character of a few generations of refined and educated ancestors. To the modern representatives of old and distinguished families he paid respectful homage. But in this, it is unnecessary to add, there was no taint of truckling or sycophancy. Of honorable descent himself, he merely believed in paying honor where honor was due. Not long since

in proposing a gentleman of distinguished lineage for membership in a certain Boston Society, he supplemented the words of nomination by the simple statement that the history of our country recited the qualifications of the candidate. With this respect for ancestry was coupled a reverence for the monuments created by our fathers which have been handed down to Societies like this to be cherished and safeguarded.

A little more than a year ago Mr. Hunnewell read before The Club of Odd Volumes the address he had prepared for the annual meeting of the Bostonian Society. He was ill, and feared at times during the evening that he would be unable to remain and carry through his part. When the time came for his paper, contrary to his wont he remained seated, and in a voice weak and husky read from his chair. But as he came to the concluding paragraph which you all re-

member, wherein he pays a glowing tribute to this ancient building in which we are gathered this afternoon, he rose painfully to his feet and threw his whole soul into those concluding lines. It was a singularly impressive incident — that silent tribute of respect for this historic structure and for those generations of strong men who reared it and made its story.

And this brings us to what was, perhaps, the secret of Mr. Hunnewell's influence in the numerous historical and literary bodies which he honored with his membership. He loved them one and all. To him membership was an important trust, and when called to office he regarded the summons not merely as a compliment, but as a call to conscientions responsibility. He took these things seriously, and in that has given us all an example that we may well take to heart. For some years in feeble health, it was only a few weeks before his end that he really deserted his

familiar haunts and laid down his much loved work. Again and again after a day of illness and pain he made his way to the meetings of those Societies over which he had been chosen to preside. He literally died in harness,

> Like a leal old Scottish cavalier,
> All of the olden time.

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